



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN

November is a month rich in history and filled with numerous opportunities to thank our veterans, our military personnel and their families. It is a season of gratitude that should have etchings of how we secured and maintain our freedoms.

Earlier this month we gathered to honor and thank those men and women who have safeguarded our Nation both in peace and in war. It was a time to renew our commitment to those who have borne the battle; those who wrote a blank check made payable to: "the United States of America" for an amount of "up to and including their life."

Our veterans have a long legacy - they saw battle unfold before their very eyes and crossed into enemy territories not because they wanted to, but because they knew it was the right thing to do.

November is Native American Heritage Month and is a great opportunity to celebrate rich and diverse cultures, traditions, and histories and to acknowledge the important contributions our Native people have given this great state.

November is National Family Caregivers month. Caregivers exert a significant amount of energy and attention focusing on the needs of others by selflessly providing care to ill, injured and disabled veterans.

November is also National Veterans and Military Families month. Serving alongside our men and women in uniform are spouses, siblings, parents, and children who embody the ideals of patriotism, pride, resilience, service above self, and honor.

Last but not least, November is a time set aside to give thanks and count our many blessings. This year, as you gather with family and friends, please remember to be thankful for America's soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coastguard who bravely answered the call to defend our freedom, to aid our friends and allies, and to turn back aggressors. In every generation, brave Americans stepped forward and served honorable in the United States Armed Forces.

We have a rich heritage of values, courage, sacrifice and honor.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

MJFSVH Update	2-3
VA FCC Partnership	4
VA Website.....	5
Upcoming Events.....	6



HAPPENINGS AT THE HOME

Every month is busy at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home, but November and December are months we have hundreds of volunteers coming into the Home to make the holidays special for our veterans.

The American Legion Auxiliaries were here in force last week and set up shop in the auditorium — literally set up small strip malls for our veterans to do their holiday shopping for their family. All the gifts provided were donated by the American Legion Auxiliaries. Not only did they help the veterans shop—but these little elves wrapped the gifts for them. Big thanks to all these great auxiliary volunteers.



Hermosa Students

A big shout out to the Hermosa students for creation of veterans Day cards and for taking the time to deliver them to our veterans!

Kudos to the Hot Springs Elementary School Student Council for delivering Veterans Day care packages to all the residents of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota Veterans Home. These great students took the time to visit each and every household and ensured every veteran had a care package.



Hot Springs Students



Special thanks to the Minnekahta Quilters Guild for presenting "Quilts of Valor" to our new veterans at the Home.

Edith Wharton said, "There are two ways of spreading light — to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."

Thanks volunteers for being our light and our mirror!!!!!!

ACTIVITIES AT MJFSVH



Big “shout out” to Stars & Stripes Household and their homemaker. Their entire household dressed up for the annual resident/staff Halloween party at the Home. Can’t you just hear Snow White, Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Dopey, Bashful and Sneezzy singing “Whistle While You Work” or “Hi Ho Hi Ho, It’s Off to Work We Go?”

Special thanks to Brett Reistad of Manassas, Virginia, National American Legion Commander, for taking time out of his busy schedule while traveling through South Dakota to have breakfast with our veterans at the Home. Kudos and thanks to all the dignitaries from the American Legion Department of South Dakota for spending time with our veterans and for including this stop on your statewide tour.



VA AND FCC TEAMING UP TO COMBAT ROBO CALLS TARGETING VETERANS

Unwanted calls account for more than 200,000 complaints to the FCC each year – a big number, but one that pales in comparison to the millions of robocalls being made each day. The calls interrupt dinners and family time, they flood landline and mobile phones, and they frequently solicit money for fake charities, including ones claiming to support America's veterans, and even claiming to be representatives of Veterans Affairs.

Together, the FCC and VA urge everyone to maintain awareness of robocalls. Here are some quick tips on how to protect yourself:

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers. Scammers may spoof their caller ID to display a fake number that appears to be local. If you answer such a call, hang up immediately.
- Never give out personal information such as account numbers, Social Security numbers, mother's maiden names, or passwords in response to unexpected or suspicious calls.
- Be sure to set a password for all voice mail accounts to avoid being hacked.
- Register your number on the Do Not Call List to block calls from legitimate telemarketers.
- Ask your phone company about call-blocking tools and services for your landline phone, and check for helpful apps that you can download to your mobile phone.

Finally, during the month when America celebrates its veterans, we suggest reaching out to fellow veterans -- especially the elderly, who are known to be particularly vulnerable-- -- and help spread the word about robocall fraud.

For more tips and other useful information, visit: fcc.gov/robocalls.



November is the time to be thankful, a time to remember and to embrace those who enrich our lives. We are thankful for all our partners that enrich the lives of our veterans, our military personnel and their families!

Wishing you a very happy and blessed Thanksgiving!

Special Note: State offices will be closed next Thursday and Friday—no newsletter next week.



VA TAKES STEPS TO IMPROVE IT'S WEBSITE

This week the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) took a key step in its digital modernization effort by revamping its [website](#) accessed by 10 million customers per month who use VA's tools and content online.

To improve this experience VA's Veterans Experience Office and VA [Digital Service](#) gathered feedback from more than 5,000 Veterans, service members, their families, caregivers and survivors.

Many customers said they were having a frustrating experience, encountering a complicated collection of websites, forms, logins and tools. Through feedback, VA learned that many of them struggled to find what they needed. By listening to Veterans and working across VA organizational boundaries, the new VA.gov website shifts from a "VA as an organization" to a "customer-first" platform.

"Veterans, their families, caregivers and our many customers have successful online transactions in their day-to-day lives," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "They should expect the same exceptional digital experience when coming to VA. Our customers will receive a more simple and intuitive experience when accessing our online front door – the new VA.gov."

The new site contains homepage content that focuses on the top 20 tasks that 80 percent of VA's customer's need, the ability to login to receive a personalized experience and easy to understand plain language content. Logged in customers will find a dashboard summarizing the current status of services they receive from VA, whether those services are provided by the Veterans Health Administration – such as prescription refills or the Veterans Benefits Administration – such as claim status. Customers can also update their contact information in one location rather than visiting multiple VA websites or making multiple calls.

VA is demonstrating that it is possible for Federal agencies to give the American people the online experience they expect and deserve. VA has been identified as the "co-lead" of the White House cross-agency priority goal on improving customer service.

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Welcome to the New VA.gov — Built with Veterans, for Veterans

Our new site offers one place to access all VA benefits and health care services. You can sign in with your My HealtheVet, DS Logon, or ID.me account to track your claims, refill your prescriptions, and more.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
 Nov 16—Dakota Dunes CBOC Open House—2:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 22-23—State Offices Closed
 Dec 4—Governor’s Budget Address—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Dec 10—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
 Dec 12—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—Noon (CT)
 Dec 13—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 17—Watertown—Noon (CT)
 Dec 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—VFW—Rapid City—10:00 am (CT)
 Dec 24-25—State Offices Closed
 Dec 31—Jan 1—State Offices Closed
 Jan 8—Governor’s State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
 Jan 18—Sioux Falls Military Appreciation Resource Fair—Central Church (Ralph Rogers Road) 10:00 am—9:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 28-29—VFW State Legislative Conference—Pierre
 Jan 28—VFW State Legislative Reception—Pierre
 Feb 2—USS South Dakota Commissioning
 Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
 Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
 July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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